

SENATE RESOLUTION 26

By McNally

A RESOLUTION to congratulate Allan Benton upon his receipt of the Tennessee Arts Commission's Governor's Arts Awards Folklife Heritage Award.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly recognize those citizens who devote themselves to their craft, honing their skills in their quest for excellence and setting a standard to which others aspire; and

WHEREAS, one such individual is Allan Benton, owner of Benton's Smoky Mountain Country Hams, who has been honored with the Tennessee Arts Commission's Governor's Arts Awards Folklife Heritage Award; having the distinction of being the first foodways awardee, Mr. Benton will be acknowledged in March during a private ceremony at the governor's residence in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, the biennial Governor's Arts Awards were established in 1971 to recognize individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the cultural life of Tennessee; these awards are the State's highest arts honor; and

WHEREAS, the Folklife Heritage Award is presented to folk artists or organizations that have made outstanding contributions to Tennessee's traditional arts; the award honors significant achievements within art forms that are rooted in the traditional or ethnic cultures of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, this Folk Heritage Award is an honor most befitting Mr. Benton, who uses his artistry, expertise, and devoted adherence to old traditional methods in one of Tennessee's renowned foodways traditions—that of curing hams; and

WHEREAS, hailing from Scott County, Virginia, Allan Benton learned the art of curing ham from his paternal and maternal grandparents; in fact, he still uses the simple rub recipe he learned from them when he was just a boy—a mixture of salt, brown sugar, and red pepper; and

WHEREAS, in 1973, Mr. Benton purchased a painted cinder-block building in Madisonville from Albert Hicks; this building has housed Mr. Benton's operation since its inception. Mr. Hicks himself had sold country hams there since 1947; and

WHEREAS, over the years, Allan Benton has committed himself to untold hours of painstaking work in perfecting the art of dry-curing pork; not content to simply work from preexisting knowledge of the craft, he took the role of apprentice when he started his business, learning all he could from Albert Hicks and contacting major universities in the South for expert opinions on the curing process; even now, he is always seeking new ways to improve his product; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Benton's dedication has proved rewarding; though he has the help of only a handful of full-time employees and a few part-time workers, he produces slow-cured pork that is coveted and consumed throughout the country. His client list includes high-profile restaurants such as Luke in New Orleans, Absinthe Brasserie & Bar in San Francisco, Momofuku Noodle Bar and Craft in New York, Highlands Bar & Grill in Birmingham, and The Standard at the Smith House in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, Allan Benton uses high-quality pork from small farmers across the country, smoking the hams at high temperatures and curing them for nine or ten months; however, some special-order hams on site have been curing for twenty-six months; and

WHEREAS, in the fledgling years of the business, Mr. Benton was tempted to expedite his curing process in an effort to increase revenue; however, with guidance from his father, he decided to focus instead on quality, a decision that has served him and his business well; and

WHEREAS, Allan Benton is a master of his craft and a true Tennessee treasure, and it is fitting that he be recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we hereby honor and commend Allan Benton upon his receipt of the Tennessee Arts Commission's Governor's Arts Awards Folklife Heritage Award, congratulating him on this well-deserved honor and wishing him much success and happiness in all his future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.